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SUBJECT: FAO/NETHERLANDS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
WATER FOR FOOD AND ECOSYSTEMS, January 31 - February 5,
2005

1. At a Briefing Session at the FAO on December 15, 2004, member countries were invited to send participants to the "FAO/Netherlands International Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystems: Make it Happen!", to be held in The Hague, January 31 - February 5, 2005. The stated conference aim is the implementation of the existing international commitments on sustainable water use in relation to food and ecosystems. Intended to provide a high-level platform to assist governments in identifying management practices, practical lessons learned and the necessary enabling environments that lead to sustainable water use at the river-basin level and harmonization of food production and ecosystem management, with a view to facilitating implementation, the organizers of the Conference are counting on the participation of FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf, the Prince of Orange, and the Vice Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

2. The organizers expect that (inter)national Partnerships in Water for Food and Ecosystems will be reinforced and established, furthering the development and implementation of international water-related policies and programs adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, FAO, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and other international fora. The conclusions and recommendations of the FAO/Netherlands Conference will be forwarded to the Thirteenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (New York, April 2005) the Thirty-third Session of the FAO Conference (Rome, November 2005), Ramsar COP 9 (2005), CBD COP 8 (2006) and the Fourth World Water Forum (Mexico, March 2006). Additional information is to be found at <http://www.fao.org/ag/sfe2005/>, including information about pre-Conference activities, such as an electronic forum, an African pre-Conference (Addis Ababa, November 2004), Regional Partner Workshops: Water Resources for Local Development: Governance, Institutions and Policies (Loskop Dam, South Africa), Large and Small Rice Based Systems: from multiple roles to multiple uses (INWEPF, Asia), International Seminar on the links between river basin management and rural development in the Andes Region (Colombia, November 2004).

4. Conference themes to promote sustainable management of water for food and ecosystems emphasize a stakeholder-centered approach. They are:

(1) Fostering implementation: know-how for action; a) how to enhance effective stakeholder involvement, and b) how to integrate and apply knowledge for managing the intertwined relation between water for food and ecosystems.

(2) A New Economy for water for food and ecosystems; a) how to assess the various positive and negative values of water use, and b) how to ensure that the diverse values of water are included in decision making processes by stakeholders.

(3) The enabling environment; a) what institutional arrangements and policies enable local stakeholders to manage their resources and to accommodate the diverse users and uses of water, and b) how can institutions and organizations offer a platform for joint decision making/negotiation involving fishers, pastoralists, rainfed agriculturalists and industries and including the specific needs of nature and environment.

5. During the briefing, Louise Fresco, FAO Assistant Director-General for Agriculture, provided context for this conference. She noted that agriculture and the environment, traditionally viewed as being in opposition to each other, are being looked at increasingly as two facets of the same thing, particularly since the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Agriculture, the greatest user of water resources, is seen as a partner

in the endeavor to find new solutions to environmental problems -- a partnership which seeks to put agricultural work on a sound scientific basis. Concrete case studies presented at the pre-Conference activity in Addis Ababa showed how to combine environmental and productive resources to address Millennium Development Goals 1 and 7.

16. In his introductory remarks, Hans Hoogeveen,

Director of International Affairs, Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, The Netherlands, lauded the importance of water and said that the Johannesburg Summit had served to put water high on the political agenda along with sanitation. He would like to see the conference avoid lengthy political statements and focus on implementation and build on lessons learned and quick results taken from experts' own experience. The product would be recommendations and partnerships between the private sector, NGOs and governments, although it was admitted that thusfar private interest in the Conference had been limited. Planned were Plenary Sessions, Working Groups, a Ministerial Roundtable, exhibits, brochures and Side-Events (6/day).

17. Another Dutch speaker described the pre-Conference event in Ethiopia. Six practical cases were presented by the government for discussion to encourage the identification of broader or general issues. Immediate conclusions were: 1) local knowledge is already available and sufficient, implementation of decisions was problematic, 2) ecological services were not taken into account, i.e. global services addressing the climate, water, etc, 3) capacity building was important.

18. Comment: The planned Netherlands/FAO conference advances themes of sustainable development, science and technology, and partnerships with a focus on implementation that are in line with the USG-advocated approach to water resources. We will want to ensure that the US is represented there with policymakers and technical experts at the appropriate level.
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